



A BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION (BR&E) INFORMATION SHEET

Integrating BR&E into Community Plans

INTRODUCTION

Business Retention and Expansion (BR&E) works well as part of a longer-range community planning document, such as a comprehensive plan, community development plan, or economic development strategy. Alternatively, BR&E can be an effective project or tool for implementing the goals, policies, strategies, and projects/actions that are stated in a community plan.



INCORPORATING BR&E INTO A LONG-RANGE COMMUNITY PLAN

Like other elements of a good plan, such as Land Use or Housing, BR&E involves the following:

- Completing a targeted inventory
- Analyzing the available data
- Identifying high priority goals, objectives, strategies, and projects
- Determining action plans

Most comprehensive plans include a chapter with a focus on the Economy and Economic Development of the community. Community and economic development plans often include the same types of components:

- Workforce/employment characteristics and trends
- Core industries/economic drivers
- Existing business base characteristics and trends
- Land/properties/other resources/incentives supporting development
- Land use plan, management, and regulatory context
- Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis
- Opportunities for business retention, expansion, diversification, and recruitment
- Economic development and redevelopment needs
- High priority goals, policies, strategies, and projects for future economic development

WHY INCLUDE BR&E IN A COMMUNITY OR COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?

- An estimated 86% of new jobs are created by existing businesses. It's easier and cheaper to keep what you have rather than recruit new businesses.

- The BR&E program helps the community conduct a targeted survey of local businesses to better understand their challenges and opportunities and to develop an action plan.
- As part of the planning process, conducting a BR&E allows a community to inventory and analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOTs) of its existing business base. Business retention and expansion also engages and mobilizes community members to gather and analyze data.
- Face-to-face interviews with businesses for data collection allow the University of Minnesota Extension's BR&E model to build and maintain stronger relationships between the business community and the larger community as a whole.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IF OUR COMMUNITY INITIATES A BR&E PROJECT?

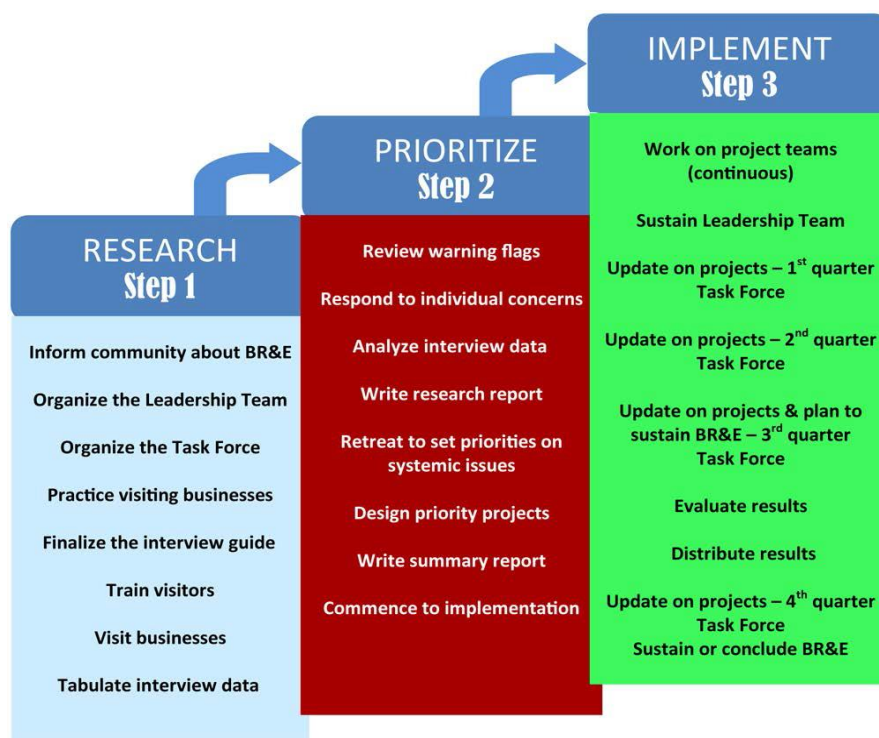
BR&E includes three essential steps: research, prioritize, and implement (see adjacent diagram). In step 1 (research), the community's leadership team and broad-based task force initiates research with businesses. This involves a plan of work, business selection, and visitor training, culminating in 30-100 in-person interviews of local business owners.

Making sense of the data is accomplished in step 2 (prioritize). This phase includes both direct responses to

individual business concerns, as well as a systematic approach to analyzing the aggregate data. The goal is to generate a plan/report with 3-5 (or more) priority projects for the community's economic development. If desired by the community, University of Minnesota Extension can prepare a comprehensive research report, later condensing it into a summary report as the community begins implementation.

In step 3 (implement)—the most important step—BR&E momentum is sustained into implementation. This typically involves recruiting volunteers and resources appropriate for the selected priorities. Quarterly meetings of the task force, along with communicating results and conducting formal evaluation processes all contribute to the success of the BR&E initiative.

Steps 1 and 2 of BR&E are well developed and predictable. However, the third step is less so because it responds to the data revealed in the business surveys. Nevertheless, by following tested community engagement processes and persevering over time, a community will experience beneficial outcomes from its BR&E efforts.



UTILIZING A BR&E PROJECT AS PART OF COMMUNITY PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

A community might also incorporate the results of a recently completed BR&E into a local plan. This valuable tool generates a plan for action addressing business development barriers and opportunities; it can also be referenced in the plan's Implementation Chapter and included as an appendix. (A BR&E Strategies Program Summary Report is about 15 pages.)

Alternatively, a business retention and expansion project can be a tool for implementing a long-range plan developed and adopted by a community or county. Below is some sample language that might be included in such a plan.



SAMPLE LANGUAGE SUPPORTING BR&E AS A PLAN IMPLEMENTATION ITEM

Examples of goals, policies, strategies, and projects/actions in a community development or comprehensive plan often address the retention and expansion of existing local businesses. Here is an example:

- **Goal:** Retain and expand current business base.
- **Policy:** Focus business retention and expansion initiatives on existing business identified as having the greatest impact for the community's future growth and development.
- **Strategy:** Conduct a Business Retention & Expansion program targeting such businesses every two years.
- **Project/action:** The next BR&E for the City of Gopher will begin September 2016. (The Project Driver will be the city's Economic Development Office.)

To summarize, University of Minnesota Extension's BR&E program is a natural fit as either part of a new or updated community plan or as an important implementation component.

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?

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